

The Red Circle

Albert Payson Terhune

AUTHOR OF "THE FIGHTER," "CALEB CONOVER," "SYRIA, FROM THE SADDLE," ETC.

NOVELIZED FROM PATHE PHOTO PLAY OF THE SAME NAME, BY WILL M. RITCHEY.

SYNOPSIS.

"Circle Jim" Borden, who derives his name from a red birthmark on the back of his right hand, is released from prison after serving his third term. One member of every generation of the Borden family has been branded with the Red Circle birthmark and that member has always been a criminal. Jim and his wayward son Ted are the only known living members of the Borden family. A detective, is detailed to keep an eye on "Circle Jim." June Travis and her mother, of the wealthy set interested in the reform of ex-convicts, meet Borden as he is released. "Circle Jim," realizing that his family is a menace to society, enters the saloon where Ted is sleeping and turns on the gas. Lamar chances upon "Circle Jim" and Jim is killed. "The last of the Bordens," says Lamar. But the next day he sees the Red Circle on the back of a woman's hand outside a curtained automobile. June Travis, marked with the Red Circle, robs Lamar. A loan shark, Grant employs Lamar. Mary, June's nurse, discovers June's theft and the Red Circle on her hand, and tells her she is "Circle Jim's" daughter, though Mrs. Travis does not know. Mary, to turn away suspicion from June, dresses as the veiled woman and is pursued by Lamar.

FOURTH INSTALLMENT IN STRANGE ATTIRE

Max Lamar, gripping with both hands the corner of the black coat that protruded from the locked garage door, drove his shoulder full against the door panel, again and again. But the wood held firm.

"It seems to be a deadlock," laughed June, forcing her merriment with a mighty effort.

"Miss Travis," broke in Lamar, "will you help me? I can't let go here. Will you hurry around to the front door of the house this garage belongs to, and explain matters? Then ask leave for me to break the door down. I can do it if you'll hold the coat corner for me."

"Shan't I hold it now?" suggested June; an idea flashing into her fearless mind. "I'll hold the coat while you try to smash the lock."

"I don't like to batter down people's property," he answered, "even in the name of the law—without asking their permission."

"But—"

"Besides," he added, "this Veiled Woman is strong. Whenever she tugs at her coat, it's all I can do to hold my corner of it. She might wrench it out of your hands."

"Yes," agreed June, under her breath, "that's exactly what I mean her to do."

But she forebore to say it aloud. And after a second look at Lamar's set jaw, she meekly turned away toward the house.

Mary, on the inner side of the garage door, had listened, panting, to

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A new terror beset June: the coat that she still held, was a menace. She began to realize this: Lamar would assuredly seize upon it as a clue. From the maker's name, he could in time trace its ownership to her.

She turned the coat over, exposing the label. With a jerk she tore it away and thrust it into the front of her dress.

She heard Lamar returning, and she carefully dropped the coat across the sill of the open door.

"Well?" queried June, interestedly, as Max came in sight around the corner of the garage. "What news of the Veiled Woman?"

"Got clean away," he reported, sulkily. "No trace of her."

He caught sight of the coat lying where June had dropped it. His look of chagrin brightened to one of keen eagerness. He snatched the coat from the greasy floor and twisted around so as to bring the inside of the neckband into view. And again his face darkened.

"Clever woman!" he muttered. "Even the tailor's label is gone. Well, there's only one thing left to do. I'll take this coat to police headquarters and have Allen send a man around with it to every tailor in the city. One of them is bound to recognize it. And we'll catch our woman that way, before another day's ended."

They left the grounds and gained the sidewalk.

"I want to thank you ever so much, Miss Travis," he said, "for being so brave, and helping me as you have today. But for your showing me where you had seen the Veiled Woman, I should never have gotten on her track. It was splendid of you."

"It wasn't," she contradicted. "I was glad to be of any help. When I was hanging on to that ridiculous coat-corner, like grim death, I felt quite a heroine. But—"

"There's another thing," he said, hesitatingly. "A thing I hate like blue poison to say; but it's got to be said. Will you try to forgive me, in advance?"

Across the greasy floor, through the

brief dialogue. As she heard June's light step receding on the driveway gravel, she threw all her strength into one last wrench at the recalcitrant coat.

The cloth was stout and Max Lamar's grasp unshakable. But the tug caused two of the coat's upper buttons to fly half way across the garage. One of Mary's lean shoulders slipped out of the garment. That gave the captive woman her inspiration.

In trembling haste, she unfastened the remaining buttons. Freeing herself, she left the imprisoned coat to fall to the greasy floor of the garage—Max Lamar still gripping its corner, on the door's far side, with futile energy.

Across the greasy floor, through the

gloom, Mary groped her way. She found the opposite wall, and felt along its all but unseen surface. At the farthest corner, her numbed fingers touched what they sought—the lintel of a door.

It was the garage's little back door, giving on the alley, behind the grounds. For one suicidal moment, she thought this back door was locked. But it was only stuck from long disuse. She threw her whole fragile weight against the dirt-crustured portal. A shower of dust and spiders' webs cascaded down upon her head. But the door quivered at the impact.

She heard voices—one of them Lamar's. And again she cast herself against the door. This time it flew wide; with a whining of hinges and a clatter of falling debris; and the rush of her onset drove her half way across the alley, outside.

Darting back to close the door behind her, the old woman cast a fearful look up and down the alley. The coast was clear. Incontinently Mary took to her heels.

Max Lamar clung doggedly to the coat corner that protruded from the garage's front door. He heard muffled noises from within. But they were so faint and the door was so thick, that he could not classify them. Nor, indeed, had he time to. For, presently, June reappeared around the corner of the big house. With her was a hatless and rather annoyed-looking woman in a morning gown and a highly interested butler.

"Madam, I am very sorry to disturb you like this. But we have chased a thief into your garage, as Miss Travis has probably explained to you. I have hold of this corner of the fugitive's coat, as you see. Will you let me break the lock of your garage door and get in? Of course, I'll pay—"

"If I may suggest," said the woman in frigid politeness, "it might be better to go into the garage by the back door, before breaking my locks. Had that occurred to you, Mr. Detective?"

"If I let go of this coat—Miss Travis, will you hold the coat corner for me while I go around to investigate? Please!"

"Why, yes," quaveringly assented June, taking hold of the cloth, alongside Lamar's own grip. "I'll do my best. I'm pretty strong."

As he disappeared, June pressed her face close against the door.

"Mary!" she whispered eagerly; and "Mary! Mary!"

No answer. Then in a moment, the sound of a key in the lock. The door swung open. The woman of the house stood in the garage threshold. June found herself holding the corner of the empty coat.

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